

Canon Envirothon

North America's largest environmental education competition.



ENVIROTHON Oral Presentation – Competition April 2, 2011

In the spring of 2010, a blowout occurred on a deep-water oil drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico off the Louisiana coast releasing millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf waters. The released oil posed potential serious threat to Louisiana's estuaries.

One of the preventive measures utilized was increasing the flow out of the Mississippi River Diversions, such as the Davis Pond Diversion, to maximum flow. This additional flow of fresh water into the estuaries may have helped to keep the oil from drifting further inland. However, it also resulted in reduced salinity levels in estuaries where oysters are grown and harvested. This threatened the oyster harvest for 2010, and the production of oysters could have been impaired for the next three years. The timing and duration of the increased flows was critical because oyster larvae (spat) require higher salinities during the early fall. By August, the salinity in some areas had been reduced to levels below 5 ppt, and the oysters require 8 ppt to "set". At this point, it was crucial that the fresh water flows be reduced in order to allow salinity in the estuaries to increase to the level necessary for oyster production.

You are part of the Governor's task force, and you must make a presentation to the Governor outlining the potential impact to the State's estuaries and the biota dependent upon the estuaries if the oil were to drift into the estuaries, preventive measures that could be taken to protect the estuaries, and the need to ensure protection of all the functions of the estuaries.

What other recommendations would you make to minimize the impact to the estuarine resources?

How would you ensure that the oyster production was not impacted in an effort to stop the oil?